CLAIMS

The claimed invention is:

1.   A method of managing a plurality of to-be-managed nodes comprising the steps of:

(a)   dividing a plurality of nodes into one or more groups, including a particular group of one or more nodes,

(b)   receiving a specification to send a set of one or more commands to the particular group of nodes, the specification designating the group and not specifying any particular node of the group,

(c)   if each node of the particular group of nodes has a return path to a source of messages, and if the particular group includes a plurality of nodes then, for each given node of the group:

(d)   transmitting a packet containing a network layer header, including an address corresponding to the given node, but not the other nodes, of the group, a second header specifying a syntax and semantic by which the packet may be parsed, and one or more messages of the set, and

(e)   waiting to receive a response packet acknowledging proper receipt of the packet from the given node,

wherein an operator can designate a given list of messages for execution by an entire group by reference to an indication of the group, rather than by separately specifying each given node of the group at the time of specifying the specific list of messages to be executed.

2.   The method of claim 1 wherein the packet is transmitted to a second one of the given nodes of the group at the time of, or after, transmitting the packet to a first one of the given nodes of the group but before receipt of the response packet from the first given node of the group acknowledging receipt of the packet transmitted thereto.

3.   The method of claim 1 wherein each given node of the group has a return path to the source of commands and wherein the command is a request to retrieve a specific information obtainable from each given node of the group, the method further comprising the step of:

(f)   receiving from each given node of the group a current value of the specific information obtainable from the respective given node.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein each given node of the group contains at least a portion of a hierarchically organized management information base (MIB), the method comprising the step of displaying on a display device the hierarchical organization of the MIB and a list of specific parameters of the MIB to be accessed.

5. The method of claim 4 wherein each given node of the group has a return path to the source of commands and wherein the command is a request to retrieve a specific information corresponding to the list of specific parameters the method further comprising the steps of:

(g)   receiving from each given node of the group a current value of the specific information corresponding to the list of specific parameters, and

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(h)   displaying a current value of each specific parameter of the list.